CONFERENCE connection
Alabama · Georgia
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SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

April 15, 2020

In the midst of it all, we proclaim "Christ is Risen!"

by Rev. Char Burch, Transitional Conference Minister

Easter may have been different than any other Easter, but I saw Easter bonnets, Easter egg hunts, heard the fabulous music and stirring messages of hope and resurrection! I was blessed! I can also continue to experience those worship services because of the technology! I want to thank all of you who made that possible through your creativity and sense of holiness. This also includes those who shared skills at technology, those who stepped up to share in worship leadership, and all who had earnest desire to connect with others to celebrate the good news of the message of God's love.

In the midst of anxieties and fears, in the midst of grief and sadness, in the midst of weariness and uncertainty, we continue to proclaim the joy of God's presence! Christ has indeed risen and is present!

And yet...things are not the same and we are not sure even what they should be. We are in the midst of a time of great transition that can lead to transformation into something new. Transition is anxiety-producing dealing with the loss of what has been, but not certain what will be. It is also a time of opportunity – trying new things, seeing things in new ways, including justice issues which are becoming more obvious.

As we hold onto our faith through this time of transition, there are two areas of concern that I want to name. One is mental health. This is an area that we do not always talk openly about. But as the time for staying at home continues and anxieties build there is the need to be deliberate

about maintaining health – physically, spiritually and mentally. The National Alliance on Mental Health has a wonderful resource for us all about staying mentally healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is listed in the resource section below.

The other area of concern is finances. We know that many individuals are unemployed with bills to be paid. Many of our churches and clergy are also beginning to struggle. Some of our churches are reaching out to those in need and extending beyond their financial resources. In response, more churches have moved to online giving which has proven to be helpful. However, reminders are also needed. One church had church leaders make phone calls to parishioners to check-in on them and then reminded them personally about the ways that they can continue to support the mission and ministry of the church. As a result, people contributed extra or decided to contribute on a more consistent basis. The Conference website includes is a recording of the recent zoom meeting addressing the "Impact of the Pandemic on Church Finances". It has some helpful tips for stewardship!

Liturgically, we enter the season of Eastertide. This is a time to explore and claim what it means to be an Easter people – a people of hope and confidence in the presence of Christ among us. May we live and move forward boldly as people of faith through these strange and challenging times.

Blessings, Char Burch

COVID-19 Special Section

April Zoom Meetings for Clergy

For All Clergy – A hour of Conversations and Prayer

- Tuesdays (April 21 and 28): 11:00 a.m. Eastern (10:00 a.m. Central)
- Zoom link: https://zoom.us/j/479440102

For Specialized Ministers

- Tuesday, April 28: 9:30 a.m. Eastern (8:30 a.m. Central)
- Zoom link: https://zoom.us/j/354744689

Live Harp Meditations for Ministers

- Thursdays (April 16 and 23): 1:00 p.m. Eastern (12:00 Central)

- **NEW!** Join us for a wee check-in followed by 20 minutes of meditation with the Celtic harp.Silent prayer and reflection will follow the meditation, depending on the needs of those gathered, facilitated by Rev. Jean Norton (questions can be addressed to Jean at HeartSongJean@gmail.com). Zoom link: https://zoom.us/j/96976838422

Tips and Tricks for Online Worship Webinar Offered on April 23

For many of us, we have been worshiping online for just over a month. Some of us have found the platform that works best for our setting including Zoom, Facebook Live, YouTube, while others are still trying to find the rhythm that fits best for us. Join Southeast Conference Communications Director Don Harris and Associate Conference Minister Heather Fosburgh as they share some of the tricks and tips they have discovered around online worship. There will also be a chance to share some of your own tips and tricks as we continue to navigate this new reality. Join us, Thursday, April 23 at 7:00 pm / 6:00 pm Central. Register here for the Zoom meeting.

UCC's "Daily Briefing" on COVID-19 provides facts to fight fear

The Humanitarian and Development Team of the Cleveland, Ohio-based United Church of Christ wants to ensure that members of the wider church and beyond get facts and not false information about the coronavirus pandemic. So it brought in a public health professional to act as the UCC "point person" for the church's COVID-19 response.

Barbara Baylor (a member of First Congregational Church in Atlanta) began work Friday, March 20, as UCC Disaster Ministries' Health Liaison. Her job: to help decipher all of the material available from a plethora of respected sources and create an online daily brief that simplifies the data and shares the latest information about the virus.

Themes explored to date include the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people of color, on people experiencing homelessness, and on children. COVID-19 and the U.S. healthcare system, recently adopted stimulus packages, strategies for coping with stress, and the discussion around whether and when to wear a face mask also have been examined.

The COVID-19 Daily Briefing (https://www.ucc.org/daily_covid_19_brief) will continue daily Monday through Friday throughout the duration of the pandemic.

Join Our Facebook Group for Clergy and Laity

We have a new Facebook Group for our clergy and local church lay leadership: https://www.facebook.com/groups/654449305307321/. The group provides an asynchronous online forum to ask questions of each other, share experiences, make suggestions, offer support, etc.

Financial Controls and Best Practices Webinar

April 28 – 2 pm Eastern/1 pm Central - UCC Insurance Board will present a webcast on "Financial Controls and Best Practices." Check the UCC Insurance Board website and the online learning tab: www.insuranceboard.org/online-learning/. There are also recordings of past webcasts which may be helpful.

Additional Resources as We Cope with COVID-19

- **United Church of Christ Denominational Resources**: The UCC has a wealth of information: https://www.ucc.org/coronavirus
- **Insurance Board**: There are also many resources on the UCC Insurance Board website: ww.insuranceboard.org
- **Horizon Stewardship**, an organization that partners with several United Methodist groups, has provided a variety of good resources for church leaders, including their series on "Resilient Leadership:" https://horizons.net/covid-19-resources/
- **Mental Health Resources:** As the pandemic continues issues of mental health are becoming more prevalent as people are dealing with anxiety, fear, lack of routines, etc. The National Alliance on Mental Illness has a free resource created to assist during the COVID-19 crisis. Click to download.
- The **UCC Mental Health Network** has a helpful post about assisting others in dealing with isolation. Look for the article "Overcoming Isolation:" http://mhn-ucc.blogspot.com/

News from the Conference Office

From the Generosity Coordinator

by Min. Carrole Moss, Generosity Coordinator

Over the last few weeks we have been unable to gather in person, however, we have been able to be in community one with the other.

I have been blessed to be in worship with many of our churches, VIRTUALLY. What an amazing experience it has been. I am encouraged that God is still in control and that we will be BETTER than we were before the COVID-19 Pandemic virus became a part of our lives. We have been connected in ways that we were never before. PRAISE GOD. We will never be the same. God is still in control.

I have been able to enjoy worship services with some our churches and I have been blessed to be in your presence. Please continue to reach out to me. What an amazing experience this has been. I cannot wait to be with you again.

I have been so blessed to be in your services in the past few weeks. Please,

let's continue to worship together.

If you are doing worship services **VIRTUALLY** and I have not checked in, please invite me to your services. I am**, WE ARE** here to serve you. We are all in this TOGETHER!!! In the past weeks, I have viewed 7-9 services each Sunday. I am/we are encouraged by the ways that we have been inspired, encouraged by and engaged in our services. I am encouraged by our efforts to continue to be engaged in the missions and ministries of this conference.

We are in a grieving process as things are not what they used to be.
We are in a process of grief...
We must understand All of the stages of grief...
We are grieving the loss of freedom...
We are overwhelmed...We cannot cope...
We are feeling that the world has changed, and it has...
Let's face it, we are all grieving in one way or the other.

Thank you so much for your continued support of this conference. Thank you for your all that you that you do to ensure that we will always **BE THE CHURCH!!!**

We are so grateful and blessed that you continue to support us in the midst of this crisis. We continue to keep you in our prayers and want you to know that we are. Please continue to keep all of us in prayer. We know that GOD is able and will see us through.

Please remember**, WE ARE THE CHURCH!!!**
Love an blessings, as we journey, TOGETHER,

BLESSINGS

Have a "Virtual Visit" by the Conference Staff

Usually, Char Burch, Heather Fosburgh, and Carrole Moss would be visiting churches on Sundays, bringing greetings, preaching, etc. Since they are now unable to travel due to COVID-19, they have been amazed and appreciative of the creative virtual worship services of our local churches online. Even though we all are at home, the staff is willing to be with you virtually! They can join your church live via Zoom, or they can create a video that can be inserted within your worship. Just let them know! (hfosburgh@secucc.org; cmoss@secucc.org; cburch@secucc.org)

Conference Annual Meeting Date Moved to the Fall

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Board of Directors, at their April 2 meeting via Zoom, made the decision to move the Annual Meeting from June 19-20 to the Fall. The actual date will be announced in the near future. Online registration has been suspended. Because the Youth Program was an important part of the June Annual Meeting and a Fall date will negatively impact the presence of youth, the Youth Program will happen in June 2021. In addition, the Boundary Awareness Training scheduled for June 18th will be rescheduled.

Prayer List

We are continuing the process of praying for authorized ministers, congregations, and ministry groups throughout 2020. We encourage you to include these prayer requests in your local church newsletter, share them with your prayer circle, and include them in your own prayers.

Week of April 5

- First Congregational Church; Talladega, Alabama
- Edward Dahmer
- Amani Legagneur
- Sandra Mullins
- Gary Myers

Week of April 12

- United Congregational Christian UCC; Columbus, Georgia
- Tonya Barnette
- Rodney Franklin
- Joyce Myers Brown

- Laura Landrum

Churches in Transition

Central Congregational, Atlanta, GA; First Congregational, Savannah GA; Trinity Congregational, Athens AL; Open Table, Mobile AL; Rush Memorial, Atlanta GA

News from the Wider Church

The Challenge of Being Apart

We know that being apart physically when there is illness and death is challenging. In this moving conversation between Rev. John Dorhauer, General Minister and President of the UCC and Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson, Associate General Minister for Global Engagement and Operations for the UCC, Rev. Thompson shares her experience in responding to her father's recent sickness, death, burial, and her own sickness.

News from our Local Congregations

How are you involved in mission/outreach during the Pandemic?

Although many mission/outreach activities of local churches have been suspended, other opportunities have come forth. We would like to highlight some ways in which your church is responding to the needs around you. Send us an article, include a picture if possible and we will fill our *Conference Connection* with examples of how we are sharing our love!

Rev. Scott Williamson, pastor of Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga TN has been delivering food to members of the congregation.

Rev. Sharon Borko, a member of Pleasant Hill Community Church, TN, has been making masks for the staff and residents at Uplands Village, Pleasant Hill, TN

Atlanta Organist Recovering from Covid-19

First Church Atlanta's very own Trey Clegg was recently featured on CBS 46 News as a COVID-19 and Pneumonia survivor. Click the image below to see the complete interview.

Training and Learning Opportunities

PATHWAYS Spring Courses Available Online

During this time of sheltering-in-place, PATHWAYS can be a great opportunity for theological education that is affordable and 100% online. We have a variety of courses beginning on April 15th and throughout the rest of the year. Think about taking a course with us for your enjoyment or theological growth. PATHWAYS does not require a long-term commitment from its participants. Why not register for a course to see if PATHWAYS is for you! For inquiries or registration email us at registrar@pathwaystheological.org or www.pathwaystheological.org.

Conference Calendar

Commission on Ministry Meeting
April 16 @ 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm EDT

Clergy Conversations via Zoom
April 21 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT (https://zoom.us/j/479440102)

Live Harp Meditations for Ministers
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April 28 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT (https://zoom.us/j/479440102)

SEC Annual Meeting (POSTPONED)
June 19-20, 2020
Montgomery, AL

National Youth Event (CANCELLED)
July 22-25, 2020
Purdue University, IN

View the **full calendar** of events online: https://www.secucc.org/events/

Contact Us

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